

Snapp Shots: Oakland's Chapel of Chimes to host Garden of Memory concert

By Martin Snapp, Columnist

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One day 20 years ago, Berkeley pianist Sarah Cahill, one of the best known exponents of New Music (contemporary classical music), took a break from performing to write a newspaper story about the most exotic restrooms in the East Bay. One of the places she checked out was the Chapel of the Chimes in North Oakland. It's a columbarium, a repository for the ashes of the dead, including bluesman John Lee Hooker, baseball star Dick "Rowdy Richard" Bartell, and Raiders boss Al Davis.

The restroom turned out to be nothing special, but the rest of the building -- oh my! It was designed by Julia Morgan, and if you've ever seen Hearst Castle, you know that Morgan was in love with Gothic architecture. The Chapel of the Chimes features pointed arches, vaulted ceilings, fountains, gardens and -- above all -- stained glass everywhere. The result is a magical ballet of ever-shifting patterns of light and color.

"To hear the rippling of the water in the fountains, smell the blooming gardenias, see the glow of warm light coming through the stained glass windows and skylights -- it's a place where you enter and you can't help but start exploring because it's a real wonderland that beckons you inward," says Cahill.

Then she got a brilliant idea: What a great place this would make for a concert! Or, rather, 45 different concerts going on simultaneously. She put a different musician in each room and invited people to take in as much (or as little) of each performance as they like, then move on to the next room and a completely different experience. And here's the most brilliant part: She decided to hold the concert on the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, to take advantage of all the sunlight.

It was an immediate hit, and 20 years later the event, called Garden of Memory, is going stronger than ever. This year's concert will be Tuesday and will feature 45 different performances ranging from quirky to bizarre. It's musicians at play, having fun doing what they do best -- making music. Among this year's lineup:

- In the Garden of St. Mark: Mills College music professor Maggi Payne playing theremins (electronic musical instruments the performer controls without physical contact; think of the end of "Good Vibrations") and inviting kids in the audience to join in.
- In The Chapel of Patience: Henry Kaiser (grandson of industrialist Henry J. Kaiser, who is buried next-door at Mountain View Cemetery) and Norwegian guitarist Knut Reiersrud playing electric guitars while Kaiser's wife, Brandi Gale, a synesthete (meaning she sees vivid colors in her mind when she hears music), makes spontaneous paintings as she listens to them play.
- And in The Sanctuary: 25-year-old composer Dylan Mattingly, who began attending these concerts with his parents when he was a little kid, playing improvisations influenced by bluegrass and the microtonal choral music of Polynesia with his old friends from Berkeley High, violinists Eli Wirtschafter and Alex Fager.

The Chapel of the Chimes is at 4499 Piedmont Ave. in Oakland. The music starts at 5 p.m. and will go on until the last of the light filters through the windows at 9. Tickets are \$15 for general admission, \$10 for students and seniors and \$5 for kids. It's the coolest concert of the year, a Black & White Ball for bohemians. Be there or be square.

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